

**STATEMENT BY  
SENATOR KEMPTHORNE**

**Public Hearing on  
Introduction of Grizzly Bears in Idaho**

October 2, 1997

Thank you for holding this series of hearings on the introduction of grizzly bear into Idaho. As an Idahoan, I have concerns about the Administration's plans to artificially introduce the grizzly into Idaho without the explicit permission and involvement of the people of the State. As Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Drinking Water, Fisheries and Wildlife, I also take the broader view of the grizzly and its status under the Endangered Species Act. I have significant concerns about continuing federal involvement in the management of the grizzly bear, a species that many scientists believe is no longer threatened.

1 As an Idahoan, I worry about what these dangerous predators will do to the people of Idaho who happen to come in contact with them. In my mind, introduction of the grizzly raises a fundamental question: how will we protect our citizens and their property from this dangerous predator? Many anecdotes exist about how dangerous the grizzly can be, but I prefer to stick with facts when I can find them.

In the winter of 1996, the quarterly magazine *Yellowstone Science* published an article on bear-inflicted human injuries in Yellowstone. The article provided data on injuries: 82 over the last 25 years-- an average of three per year. Nineteen of these were severe, and three resulted in death.

The tendency both in this article and in the popular press is to play down the number of bear-inflicted injuries by providing statistics

on injuries per million visitors, but the fact remains that bear-caused injuries and some deaths occur nearly every year in Yellowstone.

We are constantly told that by following certain safety tips, people can avoid grizzly bears or make encounters with them safe. We are also told that ranchers and other people that use livestock must accept certain small losses for the common good. I question both of these assumptions.

What do you do if you accidentally encounter a bear? The conventional wisdom is to stay calm, do not run, wave your arms, speak in a loud voice (I might suggest PRAY in a loud voice), don't climb a tree unless you can get up 30 feet, and so on.. Apparently, what you should do if you are attacked is lie on your stomach or curl up in a ball with your hands locked behind your neck, and hope that the bear will stop soon. That's not very reassuring.

I was curious about this advice, so I asked a reconstructive surgeon with more than 20 years experience with grizzly attacks about the most common bear maulings he has encountered. I am going to quote from a letter I received from Dr. William W. Wennen on this issue.

"[P]robably the most common bear mauling that I see is that from a sow grizzly, where the traveler/tourist/hunter/etc., somehow accidentally gets in between mother (sow) and a cub or two. The attack comes suddenly, usually without warning and the first time the individual realizes that he is in trouble is when he is virtually face-to-face with a grizzly in full charge. There is little if any time to react and the injuries usually follow a fairly consistent pattern:..."

I am not going to describe the rest of Dr Wennen's letter or the photos that he included simply because they are just too gruesome.

Believe me, something very bad happens to the unfortunate person that “suddenly,” and “usually without warning” is attacked.

If the data in the *Yellowstone Science* article on bear-inflicted human injuries are correct, the odds of an attack are low, but tell that to the people who have to live with the injuries... if they live. One thing the *Yellowstone Science* article agreed with Dr. Wennen about is the likelihood of being injured by a sow with cubs. The article stated that in four of the five cases where more than one person was injured, female bears with cubs of the year were involved. Overall, female bears with young were involved in 35% of the injuries.

Because of the very great danger that Idahoans would face if we allow the introduction of grizzly bears into the State, I cannot support any plan unless it is supported by the people of the State. This is not a small issue. No matter how much people in other states may want to see grizzly bears in Idaho, Idahoans should have the right to make that decision.

Turn this question around for a minute. This isn't just an Idaho issue. The range of the grizzly when European man came to North America included California. But, the grizzly was wiped out in California, just like it was through most of its range. In fact, the only grizzly bears you will find in California today are on the State flag or possibly in captivity. I don't think that I have the right as an Idahoan to insist that California accept introduction of the grizzly to the central valley just because I think there is food and habitat to support it there.

But the question remains about how the Federal government handles the problems created by bears. At a field hearing before my Subcommittee in Casper, Wyoming, I heard testimony from Terry Schramm of the Walton Ranch Company of Jackson, Wyoming near the Idaho line. Terry testified that Teton County is 97 percent federally owned, and that without a grazing permit from the Forest Service he doesn't have a viable economic ranch operation. Terry

has been forced over the years to accept losses of cattle of between 2 and 3 percent as a cost of doing business.

But, in just two recent years he lost 141 head of calves, approximately 9 percent to all causes, including grizzly bears. In cooperation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, he determined that he is living with 11 grizzly bears and 22 black bears on his 88,000 acre allotment.

When he asked the Federal Government to remove one or two of the grizzly bears that have become habituated to preying on his calves, he was given the cold shoulder. I asked Terry who has the authority for the removal of a nuisance bear. Terry's reply was: "I've been involved in this for 4 years, and I would like to see the bear turned over to the States."

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The bottom line is that States should have the right to make the decisions about dangerous predators like the grizzly bear. I have to ask, why can't the management of the grizzly bear be turned over to State control. By all measures, the bear appears to have recovered. The species should be delisted.

When the population biologists who specialize in the management of small populations ask the recovery question, they turn to a statistical analysis called a "population viability analysis" or PVA. Recently, I discovered a PVA that had been done for the grizzly bear.

Dr. Mark Boyce, previously of the University of Wyoming, and now at Stevens Point, Wisconsin, calculated that a "...conservative estimate of the probability of persistence of the [Yellowstone area] grizzly bear population for 100 years [is] in excess of 99.2%." But because bears are relatively long-lived, Dr. Boyce recalculated the probability of the grizzly bear becoming extinct within the next 500 years at 96.1%. That is less than a four percent chance that this

species will become extinct in the next five centuries considering all of the appropriate population parameters, and the probability of natural disaster.

3 The other thing that interested me in Dr. Boyce's PVA of the grizzly bear was his desire to have existing data on habitat relationships worked into a PVA model. Dr. Boyce stated that: "We cannot evaluate the consequences of natural resource management actions to grizzly bears in the Rocky Mountains until such a habitat-based PVA is completed." In response to this need, I have asked the Senate Appropriations Committee to provide \$75,000 to finish the analysis. There is every reason to believe the completed study will demonstrate that there is an extremely small probability that the grizzly bear will become extinct in the next millennium. In addition the completion of this study will have another effect.

Completion of this study will help resolve the question of the suitability of the Selway-Bitterroot habitats for the Grizzly. Steve Mealey, the Director of Idaho's wildlife agency, a respected bear biologist himself, has pointed out the Federal government's changes to the proposed introduction area. Steve suggests that the area was increased without any knowledge of the suitability of the area for bear year-round habitat. The habitat-based PVA should give us the answers to the question of suitability of habitat in the Selway-Bitterroot.

4 In summary, I can only support introduction of grizzly into Idaho with a clear mandate from Idahoans that they want grizzly bears; with a clear plan for State and local management, including control over human health and safety and predation on livestock issues; and with a clear idea that we have a sound plan for delisting the grizzly bear from the authority of the Endangered Species Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you.